

USAID's Caribbean Regional Program on HIV/AIDS

The **U.S. Agency for International Development's** (USAID) Caribbean Regional Program on HIV/AIDS works to enhance the response to HIV/AIDS in targeted Caribbean countries. Initiated in 2001, the 5-year, \$12 million program is based at the USAID/Jamaica Mission. It is designed to support HIV/AIDS prevention and control efforts, primarily in Caribbean countries where USAID does not maintain a permanent Mission, including St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and St. Lucia. Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago will be added to the program in 2002; additional countries will be phased in based on funding availability. In FY 2001, USAID allocated \$500,000 to support the work of the **Caribbean Epidemiology Center** (CAREC), and approximately \$997,000 to support non-governmental organization (NGO) HIV/AIDS prevention activities in the region.

The Caribbean program's current HIV/AIDS activities center around two primary components:

1) An NGO strengthening program implemented by **Family Health International** (FHI). Through FHI, USAID is working with local NGOs to reach target audiences including youth, commercial sex workers, and other high-risk groups, with HIV/AIDS prevention messages, behavior change and communication strategies, and care and support interventions.

FHI employs an on-site regional HIV/AIDS coordinator in St. Kitts. As of December 2001, meetings with NGOs had been held in St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. NGOs from all three islands agreed to form an NGO network to facilitate program implementation. Next steps include gathering preliminary baseline information on current NGO activities, identifying program coordinators for St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and agreeing on priority areas for technical assistance. The NGO strengthening program hopes to expand to Suriname and at least one other country in 2002.

Additionally, the Jamaican-based theater group ASHE will work with local theater groups and/or schools in the region, using entertainment to educate young people about HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and reproductive health. The Bahamas and Guyana will also receive technical assistance from ASHE to work with local theater groups and teach guidance counselors, school nurses, and teachers about innovative methods to deliver reproductive health messages.

2) Support to CAREC to address programmatic and resource gaps. The USAID regional program provided \$500,000 in FY 2001 to CAREC; the total grant is for \$5 million over 4 years. Other international donors such as Great Britain, Canada, and Germany also support the Center.

CAREC works to improve the health status of the Caribbean people by advancing the capabilities of member countries in epidemiology, laboratory technology and related public health disciplines through technical cooperation, service, training, and research.

USAID support to CAREC will help strengthen surveillance systems; assist national programs in formulating their national strategic plans on HIV/AIDS; mobilize NGOs and other

groups to initiate an expanded response to HIV/AIDS; improve HIV/AIDS services in clinical and diagnostic management; strengthen behavior and information, education, and communication interventions; and advocate for improved HIV/AIDS legislation and policies in CAREC member countries.

USAID's Caribbean program has also contracted with the Johns Hopkins University-affiliated **JHPIEGO Corporation** to implement a "training of master trainers" program for voluntary counseling, testing, and referral. The program will start training counselors in Jamaica, and will expand to the islands within the Caribbean regional program once training materials are developed and a Jamaica-based coordinator is hired and trained. The regional program will also support establishment of a regional training center on HIV/AIDS in Jamaica, as part of an initiative to create a network of training centers throughout the Caribbean.

OTHER U.S. SUPPORT

In 2002, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** will place full-time HIV/AIDS specialists in Guyana and Haiti, and at CAREC. In Guyana, CDC will carry out activities including developing and evaluating a national pilot program for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and assisting NGOs in developing free-standing voluntary counseling and testing centers. In Haiti, CDC will assist NGOs and bilateral partners in providing training for care and support activities, and in supporting voluntary counseling and testing efforts.

CDC is also coordinating an initiative to establish a network of regional training centers, with assistance

from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

The **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** sponsors studies in Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago to track risk factors and cofactors of HIV infection and AIDS-related malignancies. In addition, NIH supports AIDS-related training and infrastructure capacity building programs in the West Indies, Haiti, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

SELECTED LINKS AND CONTACTS

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Please direct comments on this profile to info@synergyaids.com.

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